

Spring 1999

The Planet, 1999, Spring

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Recommended Citation

White, Anita and Huxley College of the Environment, Western Washington University, "The Planet, 1999, Spring" (1999). *The Planet*. 27.
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the planet

spring 1999

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It was the trees that brought me here. They always do.

I watch closely, tracking the variation in each day. I am anxious and greedy for the continuous sun promised by these changes. But the visible flux only comes in terms of blocks of days. I'm forced to set each new vision against the memory of the week past to measure the season's progress.

So I keep returning to the trees in this park. They appear to stand with a little more dignity than the rest of the trees in the city. The park's borders, I like to think, were designed to offer them some recluse—a little space for their own activity, a little space apart from ours. I often feel like all the trees deserve this much respect. I wouldn't say it though; it's too much of a worn nature lover's platitude. But truly I feel a union with them.

I will admit: I even hug them.

Anyway, like I said, it was the grass that brought me here. It's the tall stuff—not the front-yard version with the bushes that look so oppressed, all clipped and trimmed, or astroturf, thank god. It's long enough that when I walk on it, I can see the path leading from where I've been to where I am, and, if I want, I can forge a new direction that hasn't already been laid out in concrete or dirt. This grass, too, is long enough that when the wind blows, it bends all the way over in one long sweep—in unison, it sways—followed by a rustle, a distinct whisper, with meaning that only comes in a shiver.

I'm not sure which part of the stalks is alive; all the tops are bleached out by the sun. It snaps when I walk on it and whistles when I blow through it. When I'm barefoot, the moisture makes an itchy tingle in the arch of my foot, but I never know quite where to scratch so I just kind of scrape one foot on top of the other.

I like the way it smells too: misty like the air after a hard rain, but still earthy, organic.



And since it was **the water** that brought me here, I try to make sure I get a little wet. It's a daily baptism of sorts. In fact, I often answer questions regarding religious denomination with the word "nature." Although this doesn't only mean the earth's physical qualities, they are indeed about as representative of the word and its veracious meaning as I can find—and water is certainly befitting; it seems to be **nature's subtle messenger**. I find whether it's ocean waves, a waterfall, the rain, a river ... it sends the same decree of eternity. And it always comes through a mantra—a repetition—a singular sound—a perpetual harmony beneath the rest of the world's clatter. Listened to closely, it's the reflection of our actual selves and the reminder to be present.

The effect on me is visual as well. The shimmer of a lake is repose for my open eyes. It's a steady image. Minus the duck or fallen tree, it has little to break my perspective. Its expanse feeds my need for clarity, for flow—a liquid mind of sorts.

I came here for the first time not even sure where I was going. I just needed to be somewhere a little less kept, a little less sterile—a little more believable. Ideally, I'd head to the mountains. But during the week, I'm locked into this urban radius. Like a large clock—a circle with ties, they keep me within the constraints of hours and minutes. Nevertheless, it serves its purpose. I come here and it's like a **breath**, a drink of water in life's marathon – a place to miss a beat or start a new one, a stop for balance – a return to gravity. In Zen, my zero-point.

So, like I was explaining, something brought me here. But now I forget what it was. It doesn't matter though. **I guess I just needed to be here.** And coming to this park, even if it's only for a few brief moments, seems to help me do just that: **be here.**

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The Planet is the quarterly enviro-magazine of Huxley College of Environmental Studies, written and edited by students. We are dedicated to environmental advocacy and awareness through responsible journalism.

The Planet is proudly printed on Arboken Agri-pulp—an acid-free chlorine-free paper that contains 43 percent post-consumer waste, 12 percent calcium carbonate, and 45 percent Agri-pulp. Agri-pulp is created from straw that wheat, rice and corn farmers would otherwise throw away. It is printed at Western Washington University Publishing Services.

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Call them playgrounds, the "boonies," wilderness areas, short cuts, the woods or open spaces. Whether you climb at Larrabee State Park, hike into the North Cascades or walk your dogs in Cornwall Park, we all habitually seek out such places.

There is a change, a release, when you enter into one. Open spaces allow us to be in touch with ourselves—leave the buildings, cars and cement of the city behind.

The smells of pine needles, dampness and earth take over and cause us to focus on our senses, our feet, our body. We pay attention to how we move through it, hearing the scrape of the dirt, rustle of the grass and crush of the leaves. Needing these places is part of our humanness.

I need these places—from the breathing areas of the city to the trails far into the Olympics and Cascades. All of these are vital to my well being.

But I don't need to use them constantly—I just need to know that they exist. There is a certain sense of relief in knowing that open spaces are not far away when the city holds me too tightly.

I am not alone with this need. The tremendous support this community shows, both financially and through volunteering with projects such as Greenways, Whatcom Land Trust and Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, is evidence enough.

In this issue of *the Planet*, we explore our open spaces and our victories with them.

Many of these places exist because we have voted for them, volunteered our time and money, and looked within ourselves to decide the importance of our surroundings.

We could call these decisions victories for the environment—saving the



photo by Alex McLean

Loomis Forest, preserving Chuckanut Mountain from development, purchasing the conservation rights to Connely Lake Creek Forest and voting to continue and expand the Greenways program.

But they are really victories for all of us.

Victories for our priorities, health and values. We often overlook the positive when it comes to the environment and lose sight of the tangible changes.

Celebrating the victories is one way to remember the words hope, faith and action belong with conservation, protection and environment.

These words represent the open spaces surrounding us in Bellingham, and the success this community has had in creating change.

A. White
Anita White, editor

Planet Index

Number of parks in the City of Bellingham: 27

Percentage of the city that is park: 13

Millions of dollars the Beyond Greenways levy will collect from taxpayers: 20

Number of visitors to national parks in 1954: 54,210,000

Acreage of the largest Whatcom County park: 2300

Acres of Loomis Forest that could be saved from logging: 25,000

Entire size of King County, in acres: 25,000

Percentage attendance at Washington State parks has increased since 1965: 227

Number of Washington State parks: 145

Total millions of dollars that need to be raised to purchase the Loomis Forest: 13.7

Number of individuals that have donated money to the Loomis Forest Fund: 3,247

Miles of trail in urban parks in Washington State: 699

Number of national parks in the United States: 378

Number of visitors to national parks in 1988: 371,489,000

Number of dogs Ben has: 2

Acreage of national parks in Alaska: 54,700,000

Total acreage of national parks in the United States: 2,313,667,200

Percentage of the United States that is part of national park system: 3.5

Year the first national park was created: 1872

Percentage of nation's biological diversity found in parks: 50

Annual National Park Service budget for 1998: \$1,600,000,000

Number of National park and Conservation Association members: 400,000

Number of visitors to national parks in 1998: 286,739,115



chang



ing traditions

story by Patrick McKay-Beach

The cedar stump sits patiently and tells me a story that began more than a thousand years ago.

A tree fell here in the forest, where the Europeans would not arrive for hundreds of years. It lay here, rotting, returning its nutrients to the soil. My seed landed on it, took root, began to grow. For centuries I grew, until my roots straddled the log I had sprouted on. Longer still, the log rotted from beneath me, leaving a hollow beneath my roots. A forest giant I became, four feet across and hundreds tall. My cedar siblings grew up around me as far as the eye could see. Then one day people, who saw me not as a tree, but as timber, came. They cut great notches in my sides into which they drove boards. Standing on these boards, they cut me down to the height I am today. But this is not the end of my story, it is the beginning. The following year the Nesses arrived.

"Tom Nessel was three years old when he came to the valley," says Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, continuing the story. Pfeiffer-Hoyt, the steward of Nessel Farm, watches over and cares for the land. "His sister Ingeborg was born in the house here," he says, indicating a small, lopsided white house at the end of the driveway.

The Nessel family immigrated from Norway in 1906. Tom and Ingeborg would spend virtually their entire lives on the farm, making their living from the land they called home. Through the near-century they lived on the farm, they developed a kinship with it. The farm became a part of the family as they witnessed the healing brought by time.

The raw hillside of stumps that surrounded me when the Nesses came did not last forever. The southern part of the bottomland near the river became pasture for the Nesses' cattle. The north end became a hayfield. And the hillside above the farm was left to heal. Trees sprang up from the stumpage, a diverse stand of fir, cedar, hemlock and maple. I told them the story of their fathers, of the destruction that led to their birth.

Tom and Ingeborg's generation witnessed more dramatic changes in the landscape during their lifetimes than any who preceded them. When they arrived in the Northwest, great dense forests and clean clear streams were standard. Today their farm is an oasis, an island of forest in a sea of stumpage.

photography by Shane Powell
photo illustration by Ryan Schroeder

"Maybe when we're [as old as the Nessesets were], we'll be able to say our generation saw the biggest change, but not now," Pfeiffer-Hoyt says. The Nessesets responded to the changes they saw by trying to preserve what remained.

The Nessesets were different from those who were here before. Instead of destroying and moving on, they came to stay with the land. I was able to watch them grow and learn a different kind of relationship between people and place, a mutual caring and friendship.

In Norwegian tradition, the land is a part of the family heritage, passed on to children, grandchildren, and beyond, but neither Tom nor Ingeborg had children. Tom may have believed he would live forever, but by the late 1980s, Ingeborg knew her health was failing. Many relatives and timber companies tried to take advantage of the Nessesets' age, offering to buy the farm or timber rights at a bargain price.

One acquaintance went so far as to take them for a "drive in the county," which ended at a lawyer's office in Bellingham. He already had a document ready for the Nessesets to sign—a deal for the land at a fraction of its market value. What he didn't know was that they were in the office of a member of the Whatcom Land Trust, Bruce Smith. Smith decided to speak to

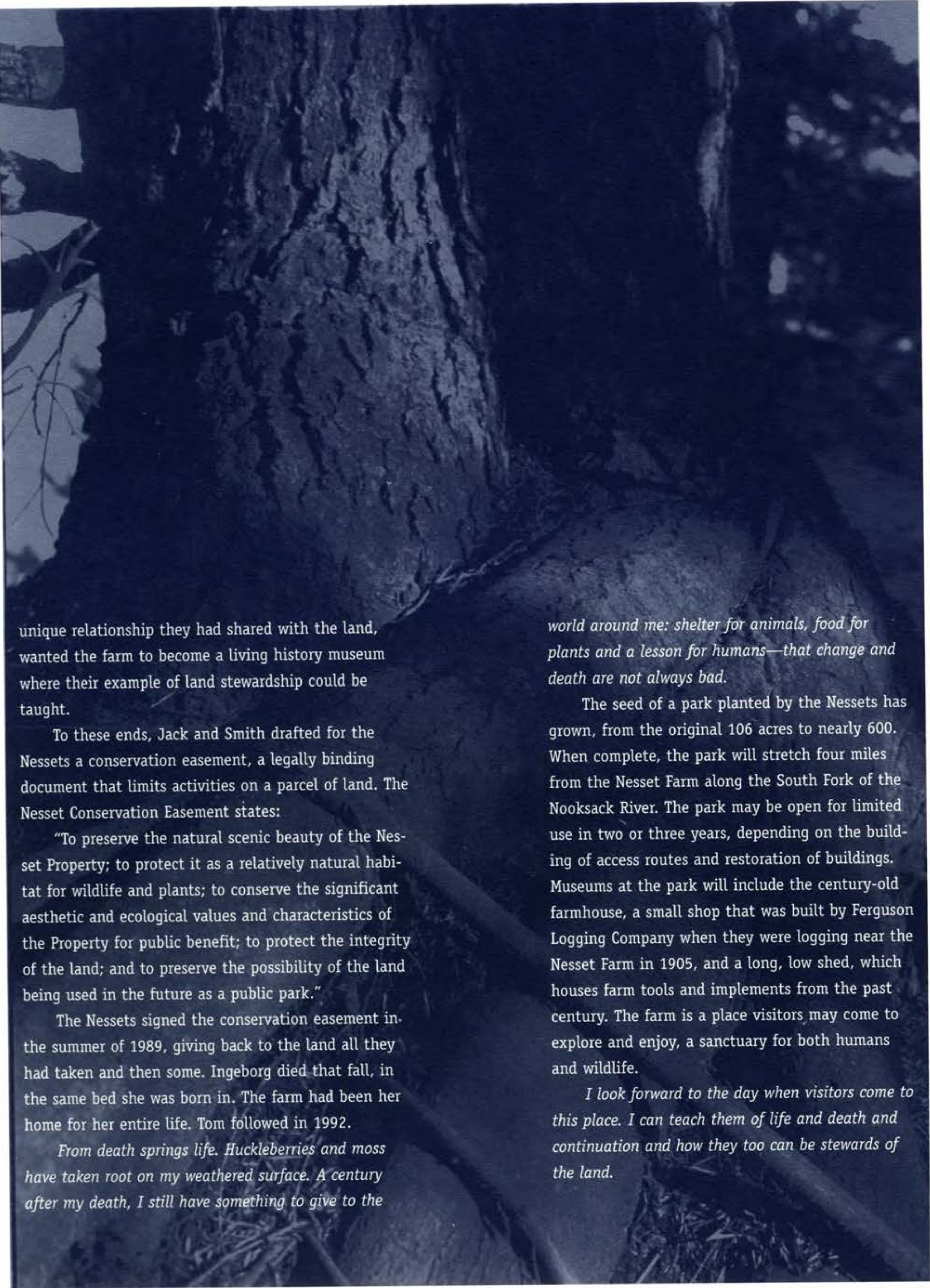
Tom and Ingeborg privately. The Nessesets, who had no intention of signing over their land, invited Smith to see the farm for himself. Smith brought another member of the land trust, Rand Jack, as well as Pfeiffer-Hoyt to ensure that the Nessesets were not being pushed into a "deal."

Tom and Ingeborg knew that unless other arrangements were made before they died, their farm would be parceled out to distant relatives. The possible fates of the land in the hands of people who did not know it was unthinkable to the Nessesets: clearcutting, subdividing and development.

I have seen the two extremes in human attitude toward the land. To some, it is only a resource to be exploited. To others, humans are a parasite on the land and should be exterminated. The Nessesets existed between these extremes. They lived as if they were part of the land, never taking more than it could give, but still making a living off of it.

Conversations between the Nessesets, Smith, Jack and Pfeiffer-Hoyt throughout the next two years brought out Tom and Ingeborg's desires for the land. Having seen the destruction of a clearcut and the time required for the land to heal, Tom wanted the hillside to never be logged again. Ingeborg, recognizing the





unique relationship they had shared with the land, wanted the farm to become a living history museum where their example of land stewardship could be taught.

To these ends, Jack and Smith drafted for the Nesses a conservation easement, a legally binding document that limits activities on a parcel of land. The Nessel Conservation Easement states:

"To preserve the natural scenic beauty of the Nessel Property; to protect it as a relatively natural habitat for wildlife and plants; to conserve the significant aesthetic and ecological values and characteristics of the Property for public benefit; to protect the integrity of the land; and to preserve the possibility of the land being used in the future as a public park."

The Nesses signed the conservation easement in the summer of 1989, giving back to the land all they had taken and then some. Ingeborg died that fall, in the same bed she was born in. The farm had been her home for her entire life. Tom followed in 1992.

From death springs life. Huckleberries and moss have taken root on my weathered surface. A century after my death, I still have something to give to the

world around me: shelter for animals, food for plants and a lesson for humans—that change and death are not always bad.

The seed of a park planted by the Nesses has grown, from the original 106 acres to nearly 600. When complete, the park will stretch four miles from the Nessel Farm along the South Fork of the Nooksack River. The park may be open for limited use in two or three years, depending on the building of access routes and restoration of buildings. Museums at the park will include the century-old farmhouse, a small shop that was built by Ferguson Logging Company when they were logging near the Nessel Farm in 1905, and a long, low shed, which houses farm tools and implements from the past century. The farm is a place visitors may come to explore and enjoy, a sanctuary for both humans and wildlife.

I look forward to the day when visitors come to this place. I can teach them of life and death and continuation and how they too can be stewards of the land.



PLANTING CORRIDORS

WORK

PARTY

story by Jenni Odekirk
photography by Shane Powell

Nine college-aged volunteers, standing under the gentle warmth of a Saturday sun, listen attentively to Greenways Volunteer Coordinator Sally Manifold at the Park Operation Station on Woburn Street in Bellingham. Behind them is a rectangular nursery containing wavering rows of one-to-two-feet-tall tender tree seedlings of different varieties, including delicately needled Western Hemlock and broad-leafed Red-Twig Dogwood. Manifold challenges the volunteers to weed the nursery and plant additional rows of seedlings.

"It's a beautiful day for people, so it's a bad day for transplanting," Manifold says. "The plants would prefer rain." Her forest green cap shades her eyes, which are slightly magnified by her large round glasses, from the sun, but not her chapped lips. Only a few wisps of cropped strawberry-blond hair escape her hat.

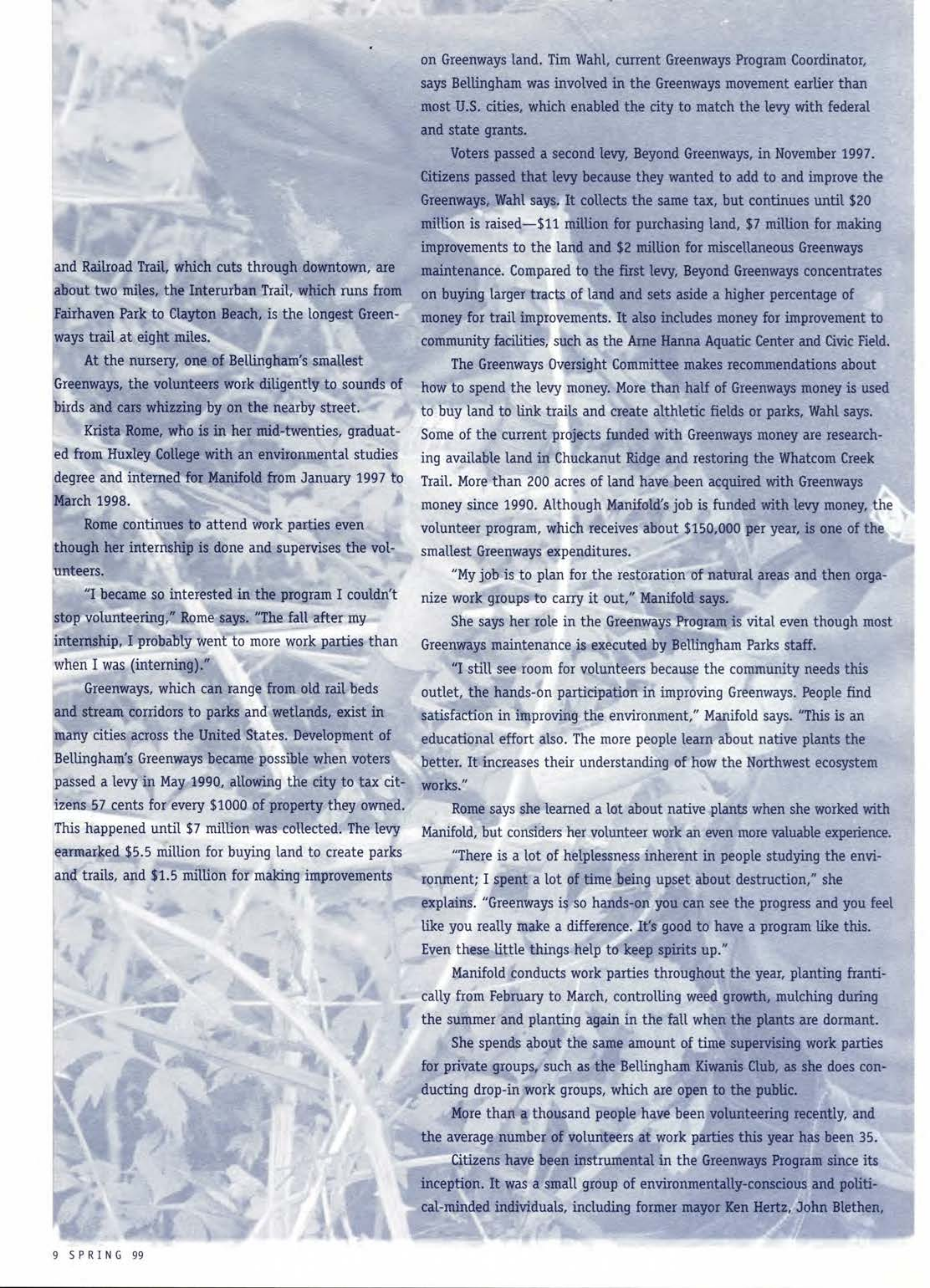
Manifold explains that fine, white seedling roots must stay in water until they are planted and must be watered soon after they are planted.

"They're like your eyeballs or the inside of your mouth in terms of tolerance of dryness," she says.

She hands thinning, dirt-stained gloves to the volunteers as she checks to see if her audience understood her directions.

The volunteers—seven of them members of Western's sailing team, fulfilling a community service requirement—pair off, and Manifold instructs each duo to weeding a meandering path between the rows of trees. A Greenways work party has begun.

Greenways corridors extend from the Larrabee Parklands in southern Bellingham to King and Queen Mountain, on the outskirts of northern Bellingham; and east to west from Lake Whatcom to Bellingham Bay, Bellingham's Greenways, the network of parks, athletic fields and undeveloped natural areas dot this area. Although most of the trails, such as the popular Lake Padden loop



and Railroad Trail, which cuts through downtown, are about two miles, the Interurban Trail, which runs from Fairhaven Park to Clayton Beach, is the longest Greenways trail at eight miles.

At the nursery, one of Bellingham's smallest Greenways, the volunteers work diligently to sounds of birds and cars whizzing by on the nearby street.

Krista Rome, who is in her mid-twenties, graduated from Huxley College with an environmental studies degree and interned for Manifold from January 1997 to March 1998.

Rome continues to attend work parties even though her internship is done and supervises the volunteers.

"I became so interested in the program I couldn't stop volunteering," Rome says. "The fall after my internship, I probably went to more work parties than when I was (interning)."

Greenways, which can range from old rail beds and stream corridors to parks and wetlands, exist in many cities across the United States. Development of Bellingham's Greenways became possible when voters passed a levy in May 1990, allowing the city to tax citizens 57 cents for every \$1000 of property they owned. This happened until \$7 million was collected. The levy earmarked \$5.5 million for buying land to create parks and trails, and \$1.5 million for making improvements

on Greenways land. Tim Wahl, current Greenways Program Coordinator, says Bellingham was involved in the Greenways movement earlier than most U.S. cities, which enabled the city to match the levy with federal and state grants.

Voters passed a second levy, Beyond Greenways, in November 1997. Citizens passed that levy because they wanted to add to and improve the Greenways, Wahl says. It collects the same tax, but continues until \$20 million is raised—\$11 million for purchasing land, \$7 million for making improvements to the land and \$2 million for miscellaneous Greenways maintenance. Compared to the first levy, Beyond Greenways concentrates on buying larger tracts of land and sets aside a higher percentage of money for trail improvements. It also includes money for improvement to community facilities, such as the Arne Hanna Aquatic Center and Civic Field.

The Greenways Oversight Committee makes recommendations about how to spend the levy money. More than half of Greenways money is used to buy land to link trails and create athletic fields or parks, Wahl says. Some of the current projects funded with Greenways money are researching available land in Chuckanut Ridge and restoring the Whatcom Creek Trail. More than 200 acres of land have been acquired with Greenways money since 1990. Although Manifold's job is funded with levy money, the volunteer program, which receives about \$150,000 per year, is one of the smallest Greenways expenditures.

"My job is to plan for the restoration of natural areas and then organize work groups to carry it out," Manifold says.

She says her role in the Greenways Program is vital even though most Greenways maintenance is executed by Bellingham Parks staff.

"I still see room for volunteers because the community needs this outlet, the hands-on participation in improving Greenways. People find satisfaction in improving the environment," Manifold says. "This is an educational effort also. The more people learn about native plants the better. It increases their understanding of how the Northwest ecosystem works."

Rome says she learned a lot about native plants when she worked with Manifold, but considers her volunteer work an even more valuable experience.

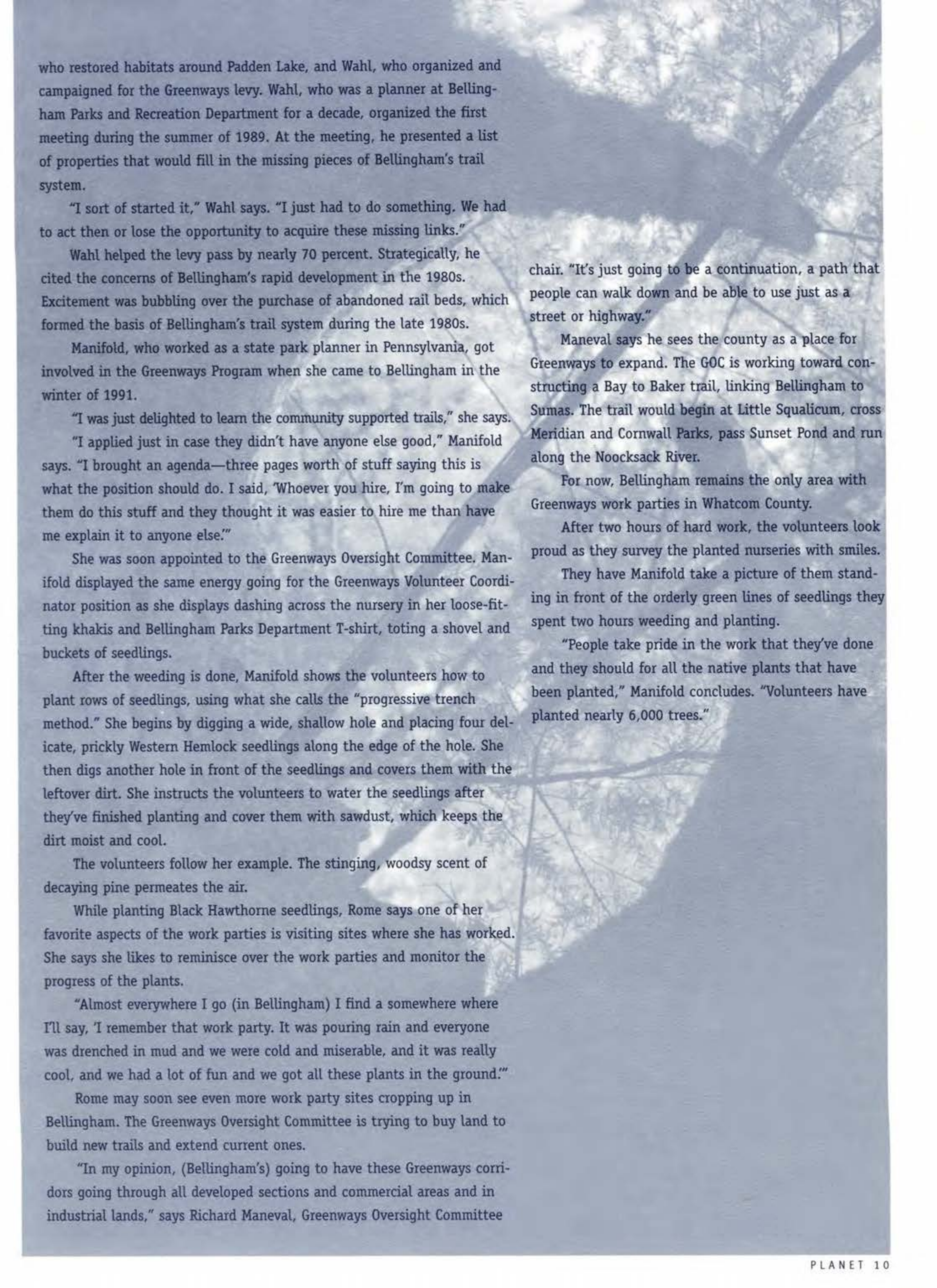
"There is a lot of helplessness inherent in people studying the environment; I spent a lot of time being upset about destruction," she explains. "Greenways is so hands-on you can see the progress and you feel like you really make a difference. It's good to have a program like this. Even these little things help to keep spirits up."

Manifold conducts work parties throughout the year, planting frantically from February to March, controlling weed growth, mulching during the summer and planting again in the fall when the plants are dormant.

She spends about the same amount of time supervising work parties for private groups, such as the Bellingham Kiwanis Club, as she does conducting drop-in work groups, which are open to the public.

More than a thousand people have been volunteering recently, and the average number of volunteers at work parties this year has been 35.

Citizens have been instrumental in the Greenways Program since its inception. It was a small group of environmentally-conscious and political-minded individuals, including former mayor Ken Hertz, John Blethen,



who restored habitats around Padden Lake, and Wahl, who organized and campaigned for the Greenways levy. Wahl, who was a planner at Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department for a decade, organized the first meeting during the summer of 1989. At the meeting, he presented a list of properties that would fill in the missing pieces of Bellingham's trail system.

"I sort of started it," Wahl says. "I just had to do something. We had to act then or lose the opportunity to acquire these missing links."

Wahl helped the levy pass by nearly 70 percent. Strategically, he cited the concerns of Bellingham's rapid development in the 1980s. Excitement was bubbling over the purchase of abandoned rail beds, which formed the basis of Bellingham's trail system during the late 1980s.

Manifold, who worked as a state park planner in Pennsylvania, got involved in the Greenways Program when she came to Bellingham in the winter of 1991.

"I was just delighted to learn the community supported trails," she says.

"I applied just in case they didn't have anyone else good," Manifold says. "I brought an agenda—three pages worth of stuff saying this is what the position should do. I said, 'Whoever you hire, I'm going to make them do this stuff and they thought it was easier to hire me than have me explain it to anyone else.'"

She was soon appointed to the Greenways Oversight Committee. Manifold displayed the same energy going for the Greenways Volunteer Coordinator position as she displays dashing across the nursery in her loose-fitting khakis and Bellingham Parks Department T-shirt, toting a shovel and buckets of seedlings.

After the weeding is done, Manifold shows the volunteers how to plant rows of seedlings, using what she calls the "progressive trench method." She begins by digging a wide, shallow hole and placing four delicate, prickly Western Hemlock seedlings along the edge of the hole. She then digs another hole in front of the seedlings and covers them with the leftover dirt. She instructs the volunteers to water the seedlings after they've finished planting and cover them with sawdust, which keeps the dirt moist and cool.

The volunteers follow her example. The stinging, woodsy scent of decaying pine permeates the air.

While planting Black Hawthorne seedlings, Rome says one of her favorite aspects of the work parties is visiting sites where she has worked. She says she likes to reminisce over the work parties and monitor the progress of the plants.

"Almost everywhere I go (in Bellingham) I find a somewhere where I'll say, 'I remember that work party. It was pouring rain and everyone was drenched in mud and we were cold and miserable, and it was really cool, and we had a lot of fun and we got all these plants in the ground.'"

Rome may soon see even more work party sites cropping up in Bellingham. The Greenways Oversight Committee is trying to buy land to build new trails and extend current ones.

"In my opinion, (Bellingham's) going to have these Greenways corridors going through all developed sections and commercial areas and in industrial lands," says Richard Maneval, Greenways Oversight Committee

chair. "It's just going to be a continuation, a path that people can walk down and be able to use just as a street or highway."

Maneval says he sees the county as a place for Greenways to expand. The GOC is working toward constructing a Bay to Baker trail, linking Bellingham to Sumas. The trail would begin at Little Squalicum, cross Meridian and Cornwall Parks, pass Sunset Pond and run along the Noocksack River.

For now, Bellingham remains the only area with Greenways work parties in Whatcom County.

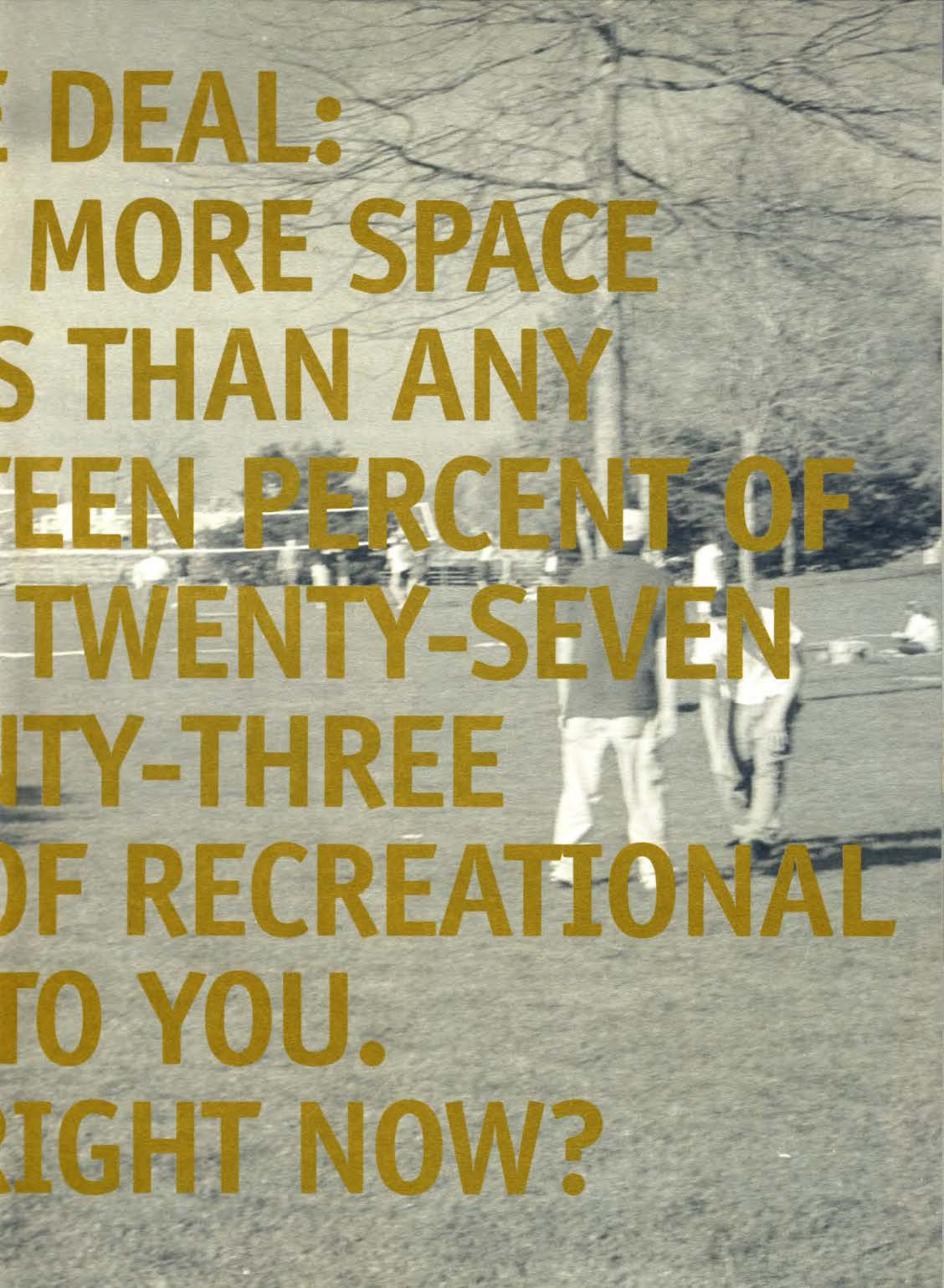
After two hours of hard work, the volunteers look proud as they survey the planted nurseries with smiles.

They have Manifold take a picture of them standing in front of the orderly green lines of seedlings they spent two hours weeding and planting.

"People take pride in the work that they've done and they should for all the native plants that have been planted," Manifold concludes. "Volunteers have planted nearly 6,000 trees."



OK, SO HERE'S THE
BELLINGHAM HAS
DEVOTED TO PARK
OTHER CITY. THIRTY
THE CITY IS PARK.
PARKS WITH TWENTY
HUNDRED ACRES OF
LAND AVAILABLE
WHERE ARE YOU R

A photograph of a park with people walking on a path, overlaid with large, bold, gold-colored text. The text is arranged in a vertical column on the left side of the image. The background shows a paved path, trees, and people in a park setting.

**E DEAL:
MORE SPACE
S THAN ANY
EEN PERCENT OF
TWENTY-SEVEN
ITY-THREE
OF RECREATIONAL
TO YOU.
RIGHT NOW?**

The Environment w/ Mary Humphries

story by Anita White
photography by Shane Powell

Mary Humphries describes herself as cynical, pessimistic and jaded. She is on a mission, determined to succeed—and confident she will. But she hasn't always believed this about saving the Loomis Forest.

"I am battle weary. I have been in the environmental and policy arena for a decade, and if you looked at the scorecard of wins and losses, the losses would come out ahead," Humphries says. "I am cynical about what we can really do to affect change in the environmental front."

She is nearing 40, and for the first time, (in a long time) she sees her cynicism retreating. She is the chief fundraiser at Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, a local environmental group, for one of its biggest undertakings—the Loomis Forest Project.

"It's an amazing thing, we have raised \$6.8 million in six months," Humphries says.

The environmental groups behind the Loomis Forest Project need to raise \$13.7 million by July 1, 1999. In April 1998, NWEA entered into an agreement with the Department of Natural Resources to purchase Loomis State Forest land.

The money will purchase the conservation rights of 25,000 acres of old growth trees in the Loomis State Forest—a forest that is slated to be logged by the DNR.

Humphries' telephone headset is off, but lies on her collar like a necklace. "Philosophically, I think we can do it or I wouldn't still be here," she says.

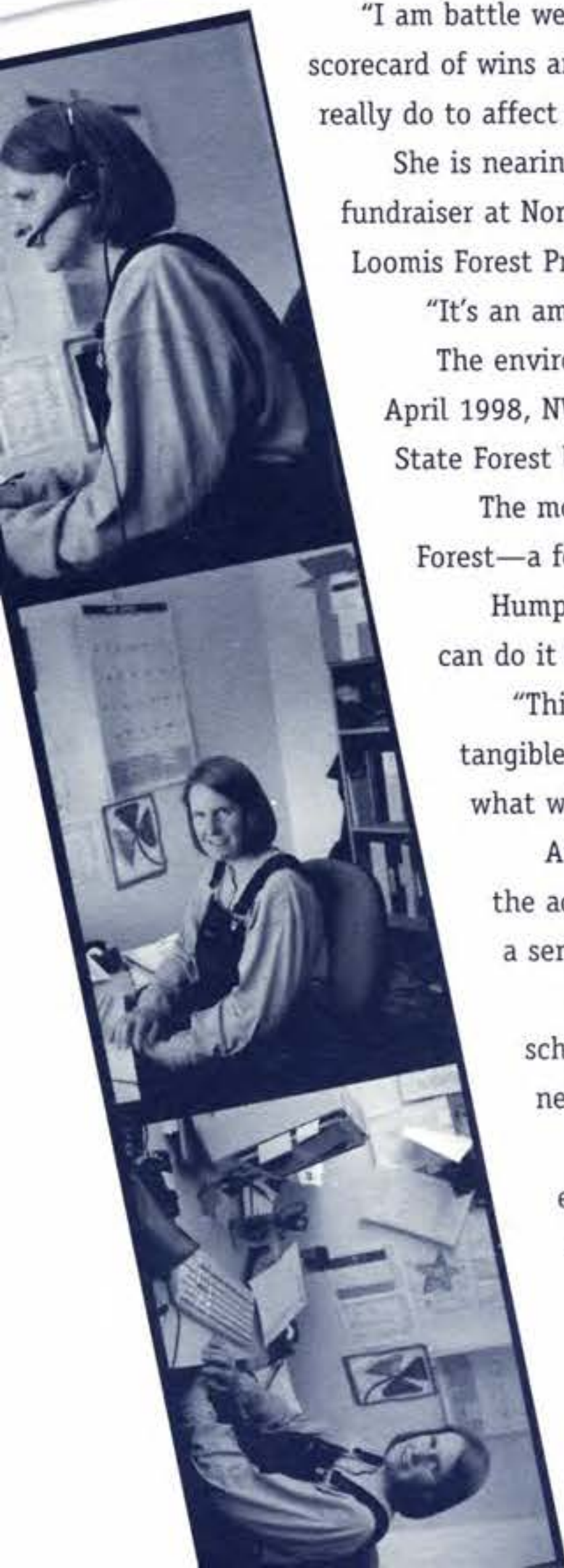
"This campaign has been different than the rest. People have wanted to give money, this is a positive tangible project for donors. Instead of donating to some environmental group that is doing who knows what with their money, they can touch, see and feel this."

After making a donation, donors receive a certificate in the mail with the township and range of the acre they saved. They can then go and see what they have done with their money. "It gives people a sense of accomplishing something," she says.

The money will go to compensate the state's common school trust fund, which is used to build schools in Washington. The DNR is mandated, by state law, with managing our state lands in a manner that raises money for building schools.

If we fail to raise the money, and the DNR goes ahead with its logging plan, they will not have enough money to build an entire high school, Humphries says. This is the irony of the issue—an entire ecosystem for one-fifth of a high school.

"I have been cynical, wondering to what extent the average citizen knows or cares," she says. "They are caught up in daily life—getting the kids to school, cutting the grass and getting groceries. They don't have time to sit and contemplate issues." And she should know—amid the



sticky notes on her computer, the volumes of Loomis propaganda and stacks of files on her desk are pictures of her own daughter.

Likewise, donors Rod and Janie Pemble have two daughters, which is exactly why they bought an acre of the Loomis Forest.

"We want to use it as our girls get older to show them that they can make a difference," Janie says. "We were particularly interested because our money goes to preserve something tangible. It is concrete and permanent and close enough to visit."

"We have had a long-time love affair with the outdoors and put our money where our hearts are," Janie says. They heard about the Loomis Forest Project through local contacts and didn't hesitate to donate.

There are three components to the fundraising: a grassroots effort where donations range from \$5 to \$5000; a Microsoft superfund match that includes current and former employees with a match from the company; and a "steering committee" that goes after high-end donors, (e.g. the millionaires).

Humphries is involved at the grassroots level. NWEA has sent, left and given out donation cards all over Washington. On average, its office receives 25 responses a day.

"We get donations via email, telephone, fax and regular mail," Humphries says. "This volume is unheard of in the direct mail world. I am starting to believe that we can affect change."

On her desk is pile of checks from the past two days. One of them is from Mark Tumboulain. It has a handwritten three-by-three post-it on it that reads, "I'm so impressed with your project, I'm donating again!"

"I volunteer when I can," Tumboulain says. "But when I can't, I put my money out there where my conscious should be. This project is a practical solution to logging and road building. People are part of the ecosystem and this way everyone wins—the schools, the forest and us."

The office manager, Debbie Craig, is opening the day's mail—23 donations—and is interrupted by someone hand delivering a \$50 check. He didn't even wait for a "thank you."

Humphries jumped up and looked out the window in time to see him get in his truck.

"Things like that happen all the time. I am amazed at people's generosity—I mean these aren't people with nice homes, cars or much extra money."

Humphries says she has been too quick to judge

people, especially at the beginning of the campaign. "When we first started asking for money our pitch was a little rough."

"At an appointment at a couple's home we had planned on asking for \$2,000, but when we saw the house, it was very modest, (so) we agreed on \$1,500. When we went inside, it was a disaster—the couch was covered in dog hair and kid-food stuff." Through hand signals and a bit of whispering, they agreed on asking for only \$1,000.

Once they asked, they could tell that something was going on between the couple. The couple went into the laundry room to talk in private. "When they returned, the man said, 'You asked for too little and closed too soon. We'll give you \$1500.' Then he proceeded to give us sales lessons."

"I learned not to judge people—donors are extremely giving," Humphries says.

"I had my change of heart in mid-March about being cynical. In meetings with new donors, in virtually all instances, I thank them for the money they have just given to the Loomis and they say, 'No, we need to thank you for the work you are doing.'"





photo by Shane Powell

Rain falls lightly as people walk out of their downtown Bellingham offices with briefcases, books and umbrellas tucked under their arms. It is a few minutes after five o'clock—"rush hour." But rush seems to be the last thing on people's minds as they stroll along the street toward their destinations.

This slow pace of life is similar to the slow-growing trees that have been in no hurry for almost a thousand years in Whatcom County.

In 1993, the Whatcom Land Trust identified a 600-acre stand of old growth forest at Canyon Lake Creek watershed east of Deming. Pacific silver fir, hemlock and Alaska yellow cedar, found in the watershed, are the oldest in the Pacific Northwest. They range from 800 to 1,000 years old. A younger forest, only 12-to-15 years old, surrounds the forest.

The WLT formed 15 years ago to protect farm land in the county. Its stated focus is to protect places that are special to Whatcom County so they will be available for people now and in the future.

Last fall, following WLT's discovery and with the help of a few key individuals, Whatcom County purchased 2,300 acres of Canyon Lake Creek watershed from Crown Pacific, a forest products company. The forest is now co-owned by Western Washington University.

Rand Jack has been one of the largest advocates for the protection of the watershed. Jack works as an attorney at the law offices of Brett and Daugert, and is on the board of directors for the WLT. He also heads the Law and Diversity program at Fairhaven College.

On the corner of Commercial

Street, where his office is located, the parking lot is empty and the last of the day's workers are saying goodbye as they head out the door.

Jack is around the office a little longer this evening. He is dressed casually in a plaid jacket and denim shirt. His earthy tones seem to reflect his passion for the environment. He sits comfortably in his chair as he speaks about the forest, in a slight Louisiana accent.

"The first time I went into (this) forest I felt an intense sense of responsibility," Jack said. "Once I had discovered it, I could not walk away from it."

His feelings for the forest are eloquently described in his article, "Why Protect the Ancient Forest?" in the *WLT* newsletter:

"I felt an intense respect and an obligation not just to refrain from harming the forest, but to protect and care for it."

"Anything that has lived for eight hundred, a thousand years, has a moral imperative in favor of being left alone. Nature has so proven her abilities and wisdom here that only incredible arrogance could lead to disturbing this forest."

Jack acted on his feelings by helping to negotiate a conservation easement for the forest, which is now held by WLT. This easement permits controlled public access through the forest and allows nondestructive scientific research—research that is sensitive to preservation.

The Canyon Lake Creek Forest is a rare find. According to an article in the *Bellingham Herald*, (May 31, 1998), old growth forests in Washington are usually in national parks and this is the first time an old growth forest has been found on private property.

Jack has taken a step further toward protecting

this forest through his materialized idea of a community forest.

A community forest provides opportunities for research, recreation and education for the community. A community's involvement with the forest is designed to give people a sense of meaning and obligation to the land in order to protect it, while helping to preserve it for the future.

Another aspect of the community forest incorporates a stewardship ethic. A stewardship ethic recognizes the complexity of the nature of the land.

One of the positive things presently in the works for Canyon Lake Creek is the opening of the forest to the public.

Jack said he envisions guided tours by trained stewards who will lead children and adults in an educational journey through the forest.

"I think things will move along slowly, but the intent is a trail through the old growth forest,"

Jack said. "Exactly what goes on beyond that is yet to be decided"

"All of those things will start happening as soon as the snow melts."

by Alex McLean



photo by Shane Powell

There were
rollerbladers, bikers,
mothers and hippies.
There were Frisbees fly-
ing over book-reading
students, errant volley-
balls casually punted to
their source by nearby
picnickers and sun-
bathers sprawled like
trauma patients.

And then there was Ben*.

Ben is the perfect anomaly. He wore a polyester jacket and long pants—garnished by a cigarette in one hand and two pinwheeling balls of fur and fang in the other—and he walked slowly through the park, without any apparent notion of the vigorous health-freaks gleaming around him in the 70-degree weather on Earth Day Eve.

The City

Ben goes to a park about twice per day, which is roughly 1,000 times more than anyone else in Whatcom County.

"If I didn't have the dogs, I probably wouldn't use the parks much," Ben said. Ben's dogs, Myster and Toby, paused from their frantic barking regiment to listen as their owner talked about parks. This topic was one they had a vested interest in. They notice that Ben's hand was, again, in the pocket that held the biscuits.

Ben said he uses the entire city park system to keep his 20 pounds of canine fluff happy.

"I know all the parks by their first names," Ben said, listing Cornwall, Padden, Whatcom and others from the 27 parks in Bellingham. "But until they (the dogs) start paying for gas, I'm the one deciding which park we use."

"Cornwall is my favorite," Ben said. "I don't want to say it's underused, but you could fire off a cannon in there during the day. Nobody would notice." Park selection is fairly random, depending on Ben's mood, but the trio has recently avoided Whatcom Falls Park since Myster had an unplanned whitewater experience there.

*Due to some unfortunate suspicion of the media, Ben refused to give his last name.

"Any park is as good as the other," he said. But, despite this seeming ambiguity, he still has strong opinions about the role that city parks serve.

"In Bellingham—if and when it stops raining—parks are absolutely vital," he explained. "They are the antidote to the poison of cabin fever."

Ben's statement is not as radical as it seems. By the late 1700s, a national sentiment for parks emerged, and in 1844, James Jackson Jarves made a plea for open public areas. "As the town increases ... " Jarves wrote, "a central spot should be reserved and trees planted for this purpose. It is highly necessary for the comfort and health of all classes that ventilators, or lungs—as these squares have been called—should be left in all cities."

As our nation rapaciously grew and tamed its landscapes, city dwellers suddenly found themselves with no ready access to green, living areas.

The only green areas that most city folks could retreat to were cemeteries. By 1834, the Mount Auburn Cemetery, near Boston, became so popular that one observer noticed "parties of pleasure come hither from the city in great numbers," sometimes as many as 600 per day, wrote Hans Huth, in *Nature and the American*. Mourning was not the priority of these visitors, however. Words like "frolicking," "courting" and "trysting" were often associated with cemeteries of this era. It was for this reason that the critic Theodore Dwight suggested our future cemeteries be designed "with reference to the living as well as the dead."

Bellingham residents, luckily, never had to "tryst" with the dead. Because of the foresight, planning, generosity and political skill of our civic leaders, we now have more than 2,400 acres, or about 13 percent of the city's total area, devoted to parks. With that much land set aside, it would seem that this community truly values its parks.

Byron Elmendorf has been Bellingham's Parks and Recreation Director for more than 21 years and his dark suntan immediately gives him away as a man who enjoys his job.

"Parks are really important," Elmendorf said. "You've got to have police and fire and public works (departments) to make a city function. But you need parks and recreation, libraries, things like that to make it livable."

Elmendorf said that Bellingham's parks are not free, but it is a price we seem willing to pay.

"The city voters have approved \$30 million for new park lands," he explained. "I don't think the community would tolerate not having parks in Bellingham. It's part of the reason people live here."

Elmendorf sifted through some of the voluminous studies that the National Recreation and Park Association have published and pointed out some highlights. "The sense of community, the quality of life, the livability of the community," Elmendorf said, "and environmental—the process of habitat, green-spaces—all of these things fall into the benefits of parks and recreation."

"We're blessed in this part of the country," said John Miles, a professor at Huxley College. And Miles, if anyone, should know. He has lived here for 30 years and has devoted much of his life to writing books and educating students about parks and conservation.

"We've got a remarkable park system, plus all the other public lands we have in the form of state and national parks," Miles wrote. "It's a rich, rich, area."



photo by Alex McLean

City parks are often too small to have any merits beyond human recreation. This is not to say that Bellingham parks and greenways are

by Alex McLean

The County

not used by critters. They are. The restoration of salmon habitat at the Maritime Heritage Park is an example of this.

County parks, however, are a little different.

"Our county parks are special places which conserve and protect the natural and cultural heritage of Whatcom County," states one park brochure. The reason a county park can boast of conservation and protection, while most city parks cannot, is because they are larger. If the county park is big enough, then the dual goals of nature conservation and human recreation can co-exist. Of the seven developed parks in the county's system, the smallest is a meager four acres.

But the largest county park is 2,300 acres. It is about 100 acres smaller than the entire park system for the City of Bellingham.

"We have, oh, thousands of acres in our system," said Roger DeSpain, the director of Whatcom County Parks and Recreation for 23 years. "I don't even know how many off the top of my head." DeSpain has seen many interesting changes in the park system. Most of the really interesting changes, however, are happening now.

"We are in the process of acquiring 4.5 miles of waterfront on the South Fork of the Nooksack—about 700 acres—and that will be a premier County Park for the future," he said, referring to Nessel Farms. "And with the salmon now listed on the endangered species list, we'll be able to help enhance the recovery of the salmon by how we regulate our use."

One of the concerns that DeSpain will have to

address at Nessel Farms is how to keep the daily crush of up to 800 rafters from disturbing the salmon.

"The carrying capacity of that river just isn't there," he explained, "and we have an opportunity to keep almost five miles of river frontage quiet for those fish."

Another recent acquisition for county parks is the Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest. This park encompasses 2,300 acres of forest, and 600 acres are trees that may be more than 1000 years old. "There are other little pockets of old growth that may pop up," DeSpain said, "but I don't think this large of a land mass will be found again."

"There's no way in the world we could be doing these types of things by ourselves. I just know it is the way of the future for groups to come together and make these projects work."

Groups such as the Whatcom Land Trust and the

Whatcom Park and Recreation Foundation are non-profit organizations that wrangle up the dollars to buy these properties. County taxpayers have helped, but as DeSpain put it, "Government can only do so much. But if you reach out and grab others to join you in common goals, then it makes it a community park, a community effort."

Bellingham is rife with parks, and apparently, we are scattering even more of them out in the countryside.

Perhaps Henry David Thoreau was referring to county parks when he wrote, "Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it."

DeSpain said he believes that our county parks, "need to provide areas where folks can walk, tune-out the difficulties of everyday life and commune with nature."

Or maybe we need these large chunks of land for exactly the reasons they were designed—for both conservation and recreation.

Will Davis, a 25-year-old Oregon expatriate, has designed a plan for an "Eco-Challenge" that skirts the perimeter of Bellingham.

"I'm not sure, officially, what parks we'll use," Davis said, "but I know for sure there'll be Larrabee

State Park, and Lake Padden, and I assume some kind of state-maintained trails up on Stewart Mountain."

The trails Davis will use on Stewart Mountain represent the three pillars of the county park story: they provide recreation for health-freaks and casual walkers; they were formed through partnerships between county parks and the Department of Natural Resources; and they are in an area that needs to be conserved as a natural resource. Anything splashing off of Stewart Mountain flows directly into Lake Whatcom—our drinking water.

"This area seems well-stocked with parks and greenways," Davis said, "so I'm going to try to use them as much as I can."

Ironically, Davis' statement—and his status as a newcomer to this county—are just what local park experts fear.

The doubling of Whatcom County's population in the last 30 years has put a lot of pressure on all of our parks.

"We need more parks because more and more people are moving here," DeSpain said. "We're in a real window of opportunity here and that window can slam shut on us real quickly; I've seen it happen already down south, so we have the ability now to get some of the gems still left in the county."

Huxley's professor John Miles shares DeSpain's fears for the future.

"The big challenge, in my view, is to provide opportunities for recreation in those areas between the urban centers and the wilderness," Miles said. "The reason we need those places is because if we all go to the wilderness, then the wilderness will be loved to death—as it is being loved to death already."

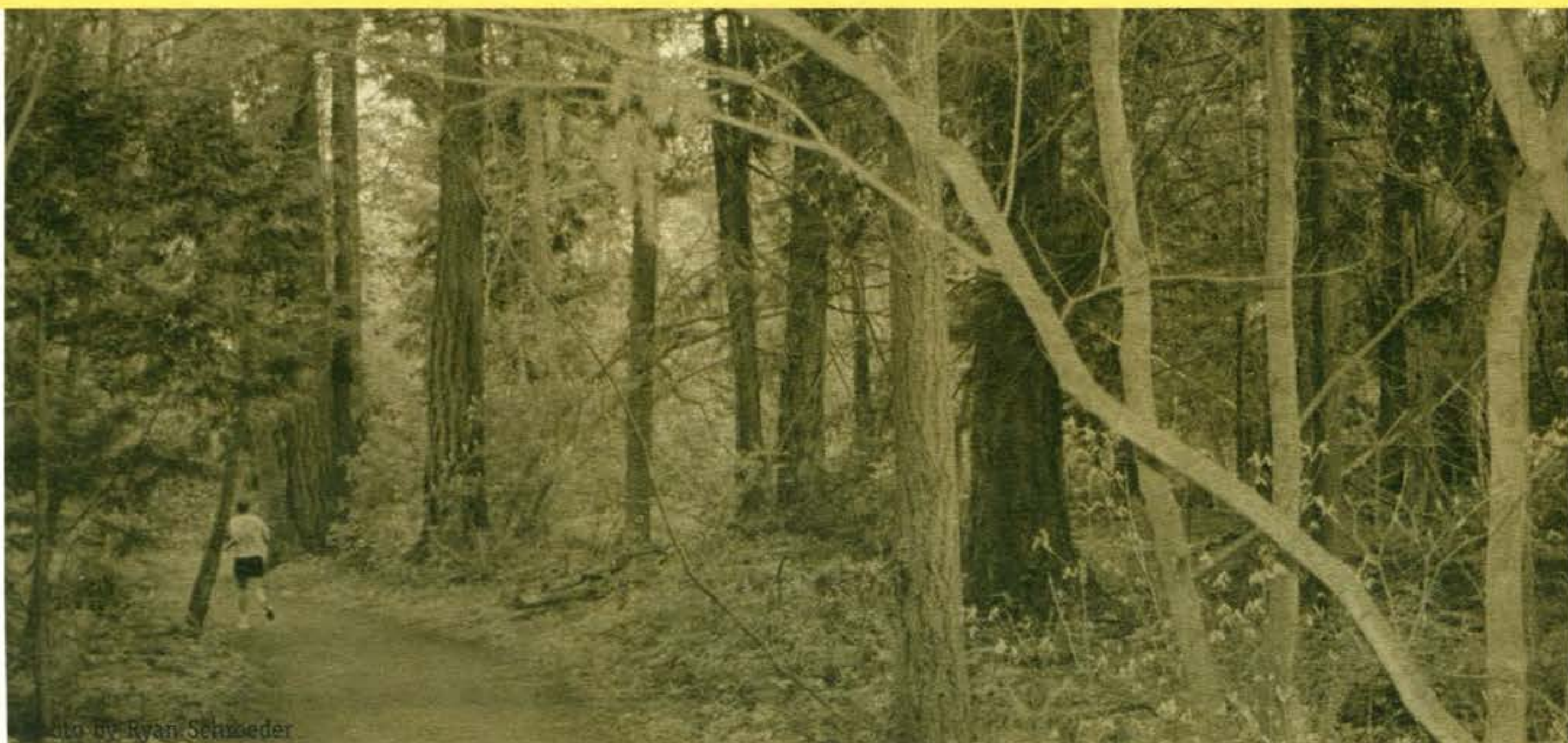


Photo by Ryan Schroeder

How can we
not love it?
Right there, in our
backyard, sits 684,000
unmolested acres of
national park land.

by Alex McLean

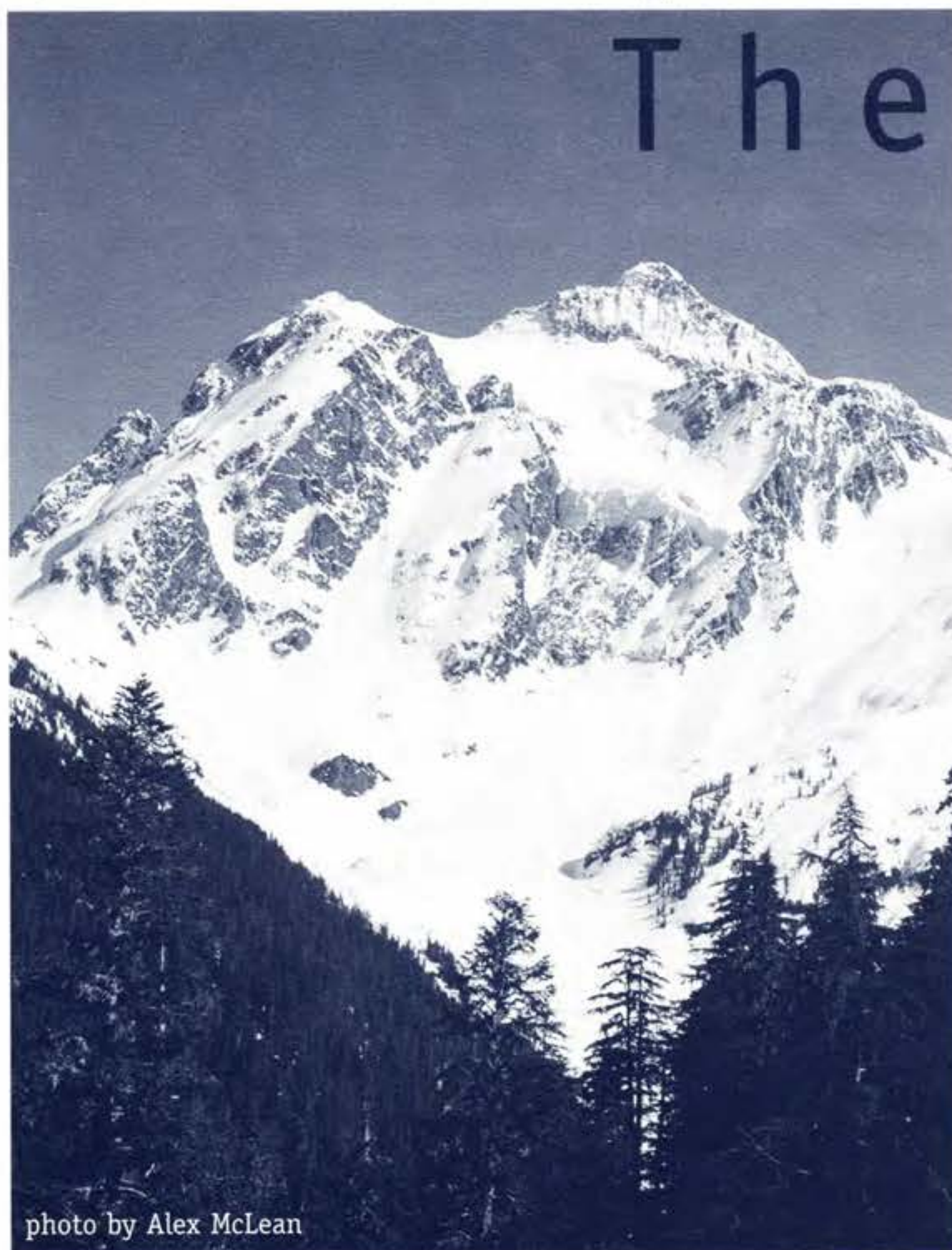


photo by Alex McLean

The

State

There are wilderness areas glued to the flanks of the park and they have, if anything, even stronger protection than a national park.

Washington State has more than 10 percent of its lands reserved in wilderness, the highest percentage in any of our lower 48 states. A glance at a map of Whatcom County reveals that more than half of it is filled by the North Cascades National Park and by the Mt. Baker, Noisy-Diobsud and Pasayten Wilderness Areas. By lumping the whole park and Wilderness Areas together, we may see a picture of millions of acres devoted to conservation and recreation.

Lucky? Blessed? The adjectives stumble for meaning here in Whatcom County.

The reason we need these massive parks is complex, but it may be summed up with one word—ecosystems. Humans need them.

We need ecosystems because they serve as natural libraries of our most specialized flora and fauna—otherwise known as green stuff and critters. If the park is in the right place, well-protected and large enough, national parks may actually be an ecosystem.

"That's one of the values of national parks and

wilderness areas," said Tim Manns, the Chief Interpreter of NCNP. "They provide habitat, the last refuges as it were, for species that need a lot of room. They are part of the spirit of wildness that these places are supposed to preserve."

Part of Manns' job is to make sure that the North Cascades ecosystem will be here for us and for our grandchildren.

NCNP fits the criteria for a National Park because there are natural elements that will not be found anywhere else. There are more glaciers there than anywhere in the lower 48 states, and only one other national park can boast of its many species of wildflowers.

"The area is also habitat for a number of very significant endangered and threatened species," Manns said. "We believe there are a very small number of grizzly bears and also gray wolf in the park and surrounding areas."

Besides the accomplishments of protecting an ecosystem and an entire watershed, NCNP also shares similarities to city parks.

"In the Wilderness Act of 1964, it specifies that one of the purposes of wilderness is to provide a place where people can have solitude in an increasingly crowded world," Manns said. "I know of a lot of people, outside of the Park Service, who use the (national) park as an antidote to the stresses of daily life."

The argument for parks began at the city level. But by the 1850s, the entire east coast had become a city and the surrounding landscapes were shaven bare to make room for farming or industry.

It is painful to admit, but when Rush Limbaugh bellows that, "We have more acreage of forest land in the United States today than we did at the time the Constitution was written!" he's probably right. The hippies of the era realized, even then, that the city parks were not going to be enough.

The campaign to save large plots of land was formalized in 1872 by the creation of the world's first National Park, Yellowstone. Since then, "National Parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst," author Wallace Stegner wrote. The idea was slow in coming for NCNP, however, since it was not until 1968 that it became an official park.

Todd Burley, a 22-year-old Fairhaven College graduate, spent his summer in NCNP working as an Interpretive Ranger. His job is to educate visitors on the unique ecology of the park and to encourage them to treat the sub-alpine areas with care. Unfortunately, Burley has seen first hand how people are "loving the park to death."

"Some people don't have any idea what wilderness ethics are,"

Burley said. "I've been up in those areas-off duty-and had to ask grown men and women, 'WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING!?' I mean, even though there's signs and stuff, they're tromping all over the place."

NCNP gets about 400,000 visitors per year, which is a far cry from the millions who squeeze through Yellowstone each summer. But because 90 percent of the visitors use Highway 20 to get there, some sections of the park are being heavily damaged.

"Aldo Leopold said something like, 'The first rule to intelligent tinkering is to save all the pieces,'" Burley said. "[Leopold meant that] humans aren't smart enough to figure this shit out on their own—we need the whole puzzle laid out before us—as we're finding out with the salmon right now. We need more parks, more protection—not less."

Burley's job has, at times, put him in the role of managing people, rather than managing wilderness. The NCNP, however, has been helped by the formation of a partnership. The North Cascades Institute is a non-profit group that has devoted its resources to educating people about our mountains and the ecosystems within them. NCI shares its headquarters with NCNP and works with Park Service employees to educate on the balance between park use and park conservation.

Professor John Miles, besides being an avid climber of NCNP's many rugged peaks, also sits on the Board of Directors at NCI. Miles said he believes that partnerships and conservation efforts should extend to the realm of government agencies.

"I think there needs to be more coordinated management between national forests, the national parks, and between the Canadian parks and American parks," he said. "The approach needs to be more towards regional management than we've seen in the past."

A few years ago, there was an effort to create a Cascadia International Park, which would have con-

nected the ecosystem of the Manning Provincial Park to the NCNP.

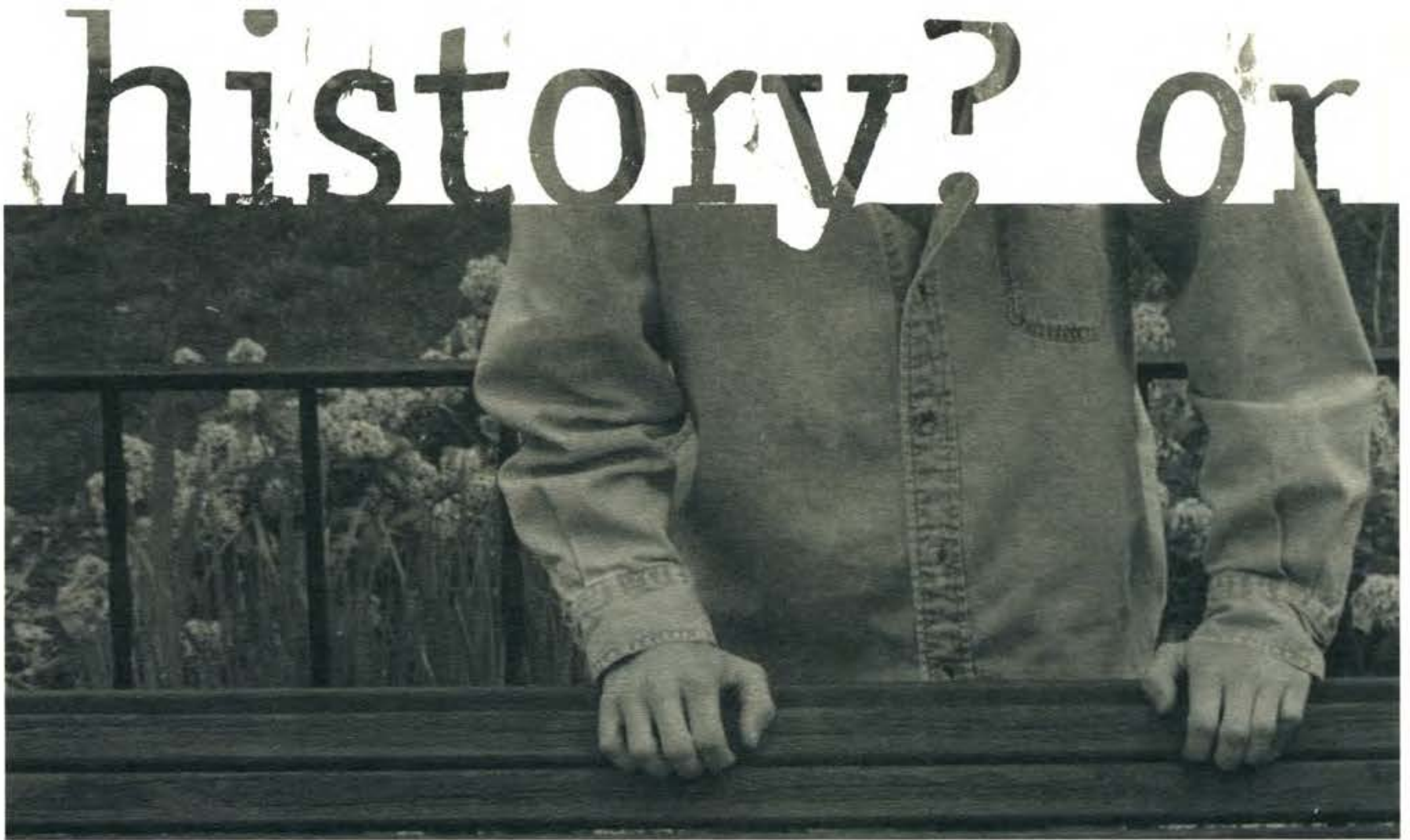
"(The plan) is unfortunately dead in the water," Miles said. "I think it was killed by hysteria whipped up by people who didn't understand what was being proposed. They believed an effort was afoot to increase public lands at the expense of private property owners. It was nothing of the sort."

Miles, however, also pointed out that these views represent a minority, and that our park's biggest threat is too much love.

"People love their parks, especially the national parks," he said. "There are over 300 million visitations to national parks each year, and once a park is established, it develops a constituency that fights like hell for it."

We know Whatcom is blessed with parks. We know parks are important to both conservation and recreation. And we know that parks are, for the most part, loved.

"I'm sure we could live without parks," Miles said, "but I'm sure glad we don't have to."



The slender young man with glasses and spiky brown hair turned from the magazine rack to watch as I frantically scanned the room. He smiled a thin-lipped, toothy grin and asked if I was meeting someone. For some reason, he looked different than expected—younger and extremely energetic.

Once seated with coffee cups in hand, Aaron Joy began to talk about the project that had consumed him for two-and-a-half years. The 21-year-old sociology major and geography minor had become the youngest historian in Bellingham, not to mention a published author.

"I finished the book at 5 before 7 on a Sunday evening in December," Joy said, shocking me with his ability to remember the exact time of the moment. "I remember on Monday I felt like Superman, this weight lifted from my shoulders. For all of January I went through withdrawal, all of the sudden not to have any projects.

A History of Bellingham's Parks, a more than 400-page book, was the project Joy said had become his lifeblood, an extension of himself. The book is the first complete written history of parks in the city.

This mammoth project started with a picture of Elizabeth Park, the oldest park in Bellingham. Joy stumbled upon the photograph while working on a different project at the Whatcom Museum of History and Art. His curiosity was piqued by the changes in the park, but not by issues of land conservation that may have led to the park's creation.

conservation?

by Kayley Mendenhall



photo by Shane Powell

"I just wanted to know why," Joy said with a smirk. "I have a bit of an obsessive personality in that sense—it just kept going. I started researching parks, and I thought to myself, I'm going to write a book about the history of big plots of grass and trees."

Joy, an admitted history fanatic, confessed he doesn't obsess about parks. He said when a topic grabs his attention, he runs with it. Right now he's working on the history of cable television.

"It's a history thing, a hard science, which is what I do," he said.

The issue of land conservation was not a driving force behind Joy's desire to write his book, or his focus on parks.

With the passage of the Greenways Bill, Bellingham citizens may think parks are an obvious part of the conservation movement. Preservation of natural areas, however, was not always the motivation behind the creation of parks. Joy said realtors like parks because they add property value to an area.

Dick Jacobson, of the Muljat Group in Bellingham, said parks are a selling point for a house, but they don't necessarily guarantee more money from the sale.

Joy said he was surprised to discover many people did not donate the land for parks in Bellingham as gestures of goodwill. A common reason for land donations in the past was to avoid paying property taxes.

Some parks were donated because the charitable act would look good on paperwork. Newer parks are sometimes donated as tax write-offs.

Elizabeth Park, located in the Eldridge neighborhood, was named after Elizabeth Roeder, the wife of Captain Henry Roeder. He was the first white settler in Bellingham Bay. Elizabeth is the headliner for the slide shows Joy puts on at the Whatcom Museum, which detail his book and the history of the parks.

"She was just really hip," Joy said of Roeder, because of her attempts to make friends with the natives in the area. "You have to remember this was the 1880s."

Recently, Joy presented his slide show to the Academy of Lifelong Learning, a group of senior citizens who meet regularly for community events.

"Slide shows are boring," Joy said. "My goal is to eventually add to them. We're losing a humongous audience who might be interested—the college scene. I'd like to have a live band performing with lights and slides, more like theater—making it more like welcome to my living room, instead of lecturing."

In a portion of the show about the old observa-

tion point on Sehome Hill, Joy said when it existed it was a great place to take a date. An audience member responded, saying some people take their dead pet's ashes up there and scatter them. Most of the audience chuckled, but a quiet woman sitting close to me turned to her friend with an emphatic nod and said she had considered doing that very thing.

Beverly George, a member of the Academy of Lifelong Learning, has lived in Bellingham since 1954, but still doesn't know the history of the area.

"It was fun seeing what the parks looked like before modern day," George said. "I liked seeing the old things."

At Elizabeth Park, the lake is gone and the grand bandstand that once housed entertainers is nothing more than a gazebo with peeling paint.

On a recent day, the rickety bandstand was invaded as a family wandered the park. Two little girls in matching pink fleece jackets chased each other through the tattered structure and peeked through the railing bars, laughing and shrieking with delight.

During his research, Joy found parks not as sacred to the average citizen as one may think. In fact, buildings often take their place. Of Bellingham's 27 parks, many of the original parks are gone. Joy said Bellingham has more parks per acre than most cities.

"Meador Avenue Park was named after James Meador," Joy said. "He named our streets, all those streets named after states. They named a park after him ... and now there's a highway over it."

Joy explained that the site of Western's Viking Addition is where the original Garden Street Park was located. Huxley College is as guilty of taking over green space as any business in town.

"Parks were at one point in time some type of asset to a city," Joy said. "In the 1800s, Bellingham was almost nothing. One way to attract settlers to a place was to make it pretty."

"Parks are great because they do preserve nature so we don't have one big piece of cement covering everything," Joy said. "Can you imagine Whatcom Falls Park if it was all houses?"

"People can come together," he continued. "We can watch a sunset from a park. People can go and relax and get away from it all and put some joy into their lives—no pun intended."

Joy told me his favorite part of the job is knowing people may read his work and relive an old memory. A nun once wrote him after reading a story he published in *The Bellingham Herald* about Larson Lumber Mill. She told him her father had worked there, and when reading Joy's story she could picture going to visit him.

"For a brief second, I made a person smile," Joy said. "If you enjoy yourself, take away a little bit of happiness—I don't care if you don't learn anything."





story and photography by Jeremi Edelmark

"I can't get away from the trees," says Chuck Zeiger.

Zeiger grew up in the woods of Squalicum Mountain, logged after he left high school and worked as a carpenter and millwright at Georgia-Pacific. Even after retiring, he couldn't stay away from

wood. He paints lighthouses on flat, broad pieces of wood and carves walking sticks and small caricatures, ranging from baseball players to Uncle Sam.

The activity Zeiger is probably most famous for in Bellingham, however, is building trails.

"(Zeiger)'s kind of a pioneer in the city trail system," says Dick Rothenbuhler, Trails Greenways Manager. "He started the work on the trails and it snowballed from there."

The tall, burly 69-year-old man with thick tortoise-shell glasses, has sporadically built trails in Bellingham since 1979.

"I walked a lot when I first retired and I'd see these places and think 'boy, that'd be a nice place to walk a trail because I hate traffic,'" he says. "I hate walking on sidewalks. It's so nice to go out in the woods. I'm hoping someday they'll have all these trails so

they'll all connect."

Zeiger began working on trails after he asked Tim Wahl, a trail planner for Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department at the time, if he could cut down a tree that had fallen on Scudder Pond Trail in Whatcom Falls Park.

"We got to talking about Scudder Pond Trail and pretty soon I was working on it," Zeiger says. "Before the Scudder Pond trail was practically nothing." Zeiger describes it as a makeshift trail from an old railroad bed with three-feet-deep mud and an overgrown patch of blackberries at its entrance. He and Dave Lynch, who, until he had a stroke several years ago, helped

Zeiger work on trails, spent three days just trimming blackberries at Scudder Pond.

After working on the Scudder Pond trail, Zeiger, with the help of Lynch and their wives, built more trails in Whatcom Falls Parks during the eighties. He built the Big Rock Gardens Trail during 1996 and 1997, which is about 900 feet long and connects Big Rock Gardens Park to Silver Beach Elementary School.

Zeiger begins building a trail by cutting down old stumps and limbs with a chainsaw after gaining approval from the Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department. Then he levels the trails—that's when people start using it. Next the Parks Department rides a tractor along the trail to smooth it out, and vegetation growing in the middle of the trail is replanted along the side of it. The final step of building a trail is laying gravel on the trail.

Deciding where to build a trail is not difficult for Zeiger.

"I just know where they need to be — where I like to walk. There's a method to my madness," he says, with a chuckle.

Zeiger shows concern for the integrity of the land when he builds a trail.

"We try to make it look as natural as possible," he says. "We try to go between big trees so we don't have to cut them down. We try to do the least amount of damage to the woods."

When planning the route of a trail, Zeiger tries to make sure hikers will stay interested in it.

"You make them so they're kind of hidden, so people will follow the trail," he says. "It's fun to go by interesting rocks and old stumps. There's always places where it's easy to walk off the trail—that's where we throw all of our brush. A lot of times I find old logs and lay them down along the trail and that kind of keeps people directed in the right direction."

The Bellingham community has reacted positively toward Zeiger's trail-building efforts.

"I've gotten too many compliments. There are people on the trail who come shake my hand," Zeiger says. The community is also showing its support by coming to work parties organized to help Zeiger build the trails.

"Because of his enthusiasm, (Zeiger) has got other people involved," Rothenbuhler says. "He makes everyone appreciate what's out there."

Although others help him, Zeiger builds trails by himself most of the time so he can choose when

he wants to work. Sometimes he works several hours several days a week and sometimes he doesn't work for months. Zeiger has been working less as he gets older.

"I used to work all day and now I get tired after working two hours with a chainsaw," he says.

He builds trails most often during the winter because the weather is cooler. During spring and summer, Zeiger is preoccupied with the maintenance of his own yard which has its own trails: strips of grass that wind around large shady trees.

"I remember chipping though the frozen ground," Zeiger says about working during the winter. "It's kind of rainy sometimes, a little bit cold, but you work harder then to keep warm."

Despite the praise and personal satisfaction he receives from building trails, Zeiger says he isn't sure how long he'll keep doing it.

"I say I'll retire at 70, but we'll see," he says, "When I'm feeling good I say, 'Maybe I'll build one more trail.'"



photo illustration by Ryan Schroder

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world -
indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

—Margaret Meade